

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

October 17, 1958

Memorandum

To: Division and Branch Chiefs, Regional and Area  
Directors, Project Leaders and Station Chiefs,  
Bureau of Commercial Fisheries  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

From: Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

Subject: Summary of Rhode Search

We know each of you is deeply concerned over the disappearance of Regional Director Clarence J. Rhode during an aircraft flight in the Brooks Range area of Arctic Alaska. Perhaps piecemeal information has filtered through to you during the search operations and has brought to mind many unanswered questions. Undoubtedly you have heard many rumors and have received some misinformation. Phase one of the search was brought to a conclusion October 6, and it seems timely to bring you up-to-date on the information we have.

Basic Information

Regional Director Clarence J. Rhode flew one of the Service Grumman Gooses, N720, from Juneau to Fairbanks via Anchorage, and on the morning of August 20, in company with his eldest son, Jack, and Fairbanks Game Agent Stanley Fredericksen, departed from the Fairbanks International Airport at 12:10 p.m. for Porcupine Lake on the north drainage of the Brooks Range. Prior to his departure there was no discussion of his plans with Fish and Wildlife Service or other personnel except that it was understood he was going to Porcupine Lake, would put out some gas caches for later use of Fredericksen, and would do some reconnoitering of sheep conditions and hunting camps. There was no indication of the area he had planned to cover prior to departing Fairbanks. 200 gallons of cased aviation gasoline were loaded aboard the aircraft.

A radio position report was made to the Fairbanks office on the Fish and Wildlife Service frequency over the middle fork of the Chandalar River at 1:25 p.m., and a second radioed position report to the Fairbanks office was transmitted from the water on Porcupine Lake at 2:20 p.m. This was the last radio communication received from N720. Failure to make further radio contact is attributed to a severe radio blackout due to atmospheric conditions which existed well into the following week.

The party is known to have taken off later in the afternoon of August 20, and proceeded from Porcupine Lake to Peters and Shrader Lakes approximately 40 miles northeast. At Peters Lake they were observed by the wife of a hunting guide who had remained in camp, and they visited with an IGY party also camped on Peters Lake. They commented to the IGY party they were planning to go west and possibly return to Porcupine Lake, but were generally non-communicative as to their plans. They were observed to proceed to the adjoining Shrader Lake and to take on gas from a cache left by a Geological Survey party. It is presumed they topped off their tanks from this supply and a quantity remained for future use by Agent Fredericksen or by Mr. Rhode on his proposed flight of August 24 with Messrs. "Pink" Gutermuth and E. A. Seaman of Washington, D. C. who were visiting several Alaskan areas.

They were observed to take off from Shrader Lake and head in a westerly direction about 5:00 p.m. August 20. Evidence is not conclusive as to where they spent the night of August 20. There is reason to believe they returned to Porcupine Lake after some reconnaissance and spent the night there. This evidence is substantiated by 10 empty 5-gallon gas cans which cannot be traced to other parties and are presumed to be from the stock Rhode was carrying with him in N720. This would approximate the gas used for such a flight with some reconnaissance enroute.

The next information on the aircraft comes from a hunting party guide who spotted the plane flying high over Chandler Lake some 170 nautical miles west of Porcupine Lake about 1:00 p.m. the afternoon of August 21. At the time of observation, they were flying at an estimated altitude of four to five thousand feet above the lake. This sighting was made by a guide from Kodiak Island known to be reliable and familiar with Fish and Wildlife Service Grumman aircraft. The plane was observed through field glasses. It was further identified by two other members of the party who have been employed as stream guards on Kodiak Island in an area serviced by one of our Grumman Gooses. The date and approximate time were computed from the hunter's diary. As a further check, the officer in charge of the 71st Search and Rescue Squadron ascertained that no other Grumman Goose or Grumman Widgeon aircraft were operating in the area at the time of the sighting. We assume, therefore, that this sighting is reliable.

A search of CAA and other communication records reveals no communication with N720. A check of the DEW line radar sites reveals no spottings of this aircraft. The search revealed no gas caches or empty cans from the stock aboard N720 that can be identified as such other than the ten empty cans found on Porcupine Lake. Hunting parties were checked as they came out of the Arctic but only the aforementioned report of the sighting over Chandler Lake gives information on the activities of the party. Trail was obliterated as the plane

disappeared in a northwesterly direction from Chandler Lake at an altitude of four to five thousand feet about one p.m. on the afternoon of August 21. Weather at the time in the vicinity of Chandler Lake was good. The party was due to return to Fairbanks for a meeting, and for other reasons, on Saturday morning, August 23. It was expected they would be in Fairbanks the evening of August 22. Weather reports from the Brooks Range are fragmentary. Apparently on Friday, August 22, weather conditions were spotty--good in some areas, poor in others.

### The Search

When the aircraft failed to return to Fairbanks on the morning of August 23, a Fish and Wildlife Service aircraft was dispatched immediately to check the most likely lakes and routes of travel with the thought the amphibian might be down with minor trouble. August 24, two planes were dispatched to pursue the same type of search. August 25, the Air Force 71st Search and Rescue Squadron, Anchorage, was detailed to the search. The known information was reviewed, checks were made for a possible radar sighting by the DEW line stations and for possible communications received by other agencies such as CAA and local airlines. Since there was very little information available as to the party's plans or the area they would cover, a systematic search was initiated.

Major John Kearney was placed in charge by the 71st Search and Rescue Squadron and set up offices in the Fish and Wildlife Service Fairbanks office as a control center. Peter Nelson was detailed from the Juneau Office to Fairbanks to coordinate the search activities. The most likely areas were laid out into a grid pattern, each grid being 25 by 30 miles, or 30 minutes of longitude and one degree of latitude. Each search aircraft was assigned a grid and stayed with that grid until it was considered 100% covered. Grids were covered on a transect basis in the flat country. In the hill country transect coverage was given across the top followed by contour coverage of the drainages. One observer tracked the course with a pencil line on the chart to assure full coverage. An aircraft would take all day or in a few instances longer to gain 100% coverage of a grid in the rugged mountain terrain. In the flat, treeless Arctic Coastal Plain up to 3 grids per day could be covered.

As many as 26 aircraft participated in one day's search. There was an average of 12 per day--about as many as could be efficiently handled with safe control and the support facilities available. All aircraft were in radio contact with the Fairbanks control center operating on the Service frequency of 5907.5 kc. As each aircraft completed a grid it was assigned a new grid by the control center. Both night and day coverage were flown in the early stages of the search. Aircraft of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Civil Aeronautics Administration, and the Air Force, as well as many private operators, contributing their time and equipment, participated

in the search activities. Through September 23, the following search time was expended: Fish and Wildlife Service aircraft 716.8 hours; Bureau of Land Management Aircraft 266 hours; Civil Aeronautics Administration aircraft 106.7 hours; Air Force 412.3 hours; and private equipment 116 hours. In addition to the search time the CAA flew 5.4 hours and the Air Force 38 hours of support time hauling gas supplies to the search aircraft bases. The Air Force expended another 38 hours of weather flight time. Since September 23 it is estimated more than 200 additional hours of Fish and Wildlife Service search time has been flown. It is estimated that approximately 1036 man-days of flight crew time were used through September 23. An estimated 280,000 square miles have been searched in the above manner. September 6, Safety Coordinator John N. Ball was detailed to represent the Washington office in the search operations.

The search was well organized and systematically conducted. It functioned smoothly with only one emergency developing, September 19, when one of the Cessna 180's developed a break in its oil cooler. A forced landing was made on a nearby lake. A new oil cooler was flown in from Fairbanks, and the aircraft was back at its operating base that evening. Search aircraft were based out of Porcupine Lake, Peters Lake, Bettles, Umiat, Fort Yukon, Fairbanks, Galena, Kotzebue, and Point Barrow. Some aircraft were returned to Anchorage for 100-hour periodic maintenance, others to Fairbanks. Routine maintenance was conducted at all operating bases to keep the aircraft in flying condition. All who participated in the search activities and the behind-the-lines support are to be commended for a job well done.

The Air Force suspended its participation in the search and withdrew to Anchorage September 17. The Bureau of Land Management aircraft were released after their flights on September 17. Sufficient Fish and Wildlife Service aircraft were available to complete the coverage of the remaining area. The Fish and Wildlife Service aircraft completed this phase of the search October 6. The area covered extends from Fairbanks north to the Arctic Ocean and from 138° west longitude in northwestern Canada westward to the Bering Sea with coverage extending below Unalakleet.

The search has revealed no sign of either the aircraft or survivors. All leads and reports of lights, radio signals, sunken aircraft, parties afloat, etc. were carefully investigated to a point where they could be eliminated. Much of the country is rugged mountainous terrain where a wrecked aircraft might be passed over unobserved if light or the angle of approach were not just right. As the search progressed westward, snow on the tops of the hills toward the middle of September would tend to obscure wreckage. A part of the search area south of Bettles

is heavily wooded and a downed aircraft would be difficult to spot since the foliage was still on the trees. There is no information on which to base an assumption of what may have happened.

### Future Plans

The tremendous area covered and the thoroughness of the search are most discouraging to the possibility of finding survivors. The aircraft, however, was well equipped with survival gear, including rations, rifles, bed rolls, tent flares, and other emergency equipment. The entire area is well stocked with game and all three are quite capable of taking care of themselves under such conditions if not seriously injured.

Travel in this north country can best be performed after the freeze and snow. In the bare hope there may yet be survivors, the second phase of the search will be initiated after the freeze and snow. This phase will be on a reduced scale with ski-equipped Cessna 180's checking the main drainages for possible survivors working their way out. Some of this search will be chartered from the commercial operator at Bettles. The picture is not encouraging, but we cannot afford to overlook this last possibility.

